

100' Defensible Space Update

January 11, 2006



In January 2005 a new state law became effective that extended the defensible space clearance around buildings and structures from 30 feet to 100 feet. Proper clearance out to 100 feet dramatically increases the chance of your house surviving a wildfire. This defensible space also provides for firefighter safety when protecting homes during a firestorm. The following is the latest information to come out of last year's new law:

- State law now requires 100 feet of defensible space clearance in most rural areas of California. Some local jurisdictions have ordinances that require more than 100 feet while many municipalities may have no requirements
- The Board of Forestry and Fire Protection (Board) on Thursday January 5, 2006 received additional public comment on proposed defensible space regulations and guidelines designed to advise homeowners on how to comply with the new 100 foot requirement.
- The Board directed staff to issue revised regulations and guidelines based on oral testimony and written comments. Once issued, these revised documents will be available for public review and comment.
- The earliest the Board is expected to finalize the regulations is at the February meeting, but it could be continued until the March meeting.
- After the Board adopts final language, it must be approved by the Office of Administrative Law before it becomes official. This process usually takes 30 days.
- Now that the Board language is nearly finalized, CDF is embarking on a training program for its inspectors. Delivery of this training is expected by April, 2006.
- CDF is also preparing public information documents, brochures, and web content to explain to homeowners how to comply with the new regulations. The basis of this information will be the "Guidance" document prepared by the Board. This Guidance document takes into account the extreme variability of California's vegetation and ecological zones.
- Since the State law now requires 100 feet of defensible space, and even though these guidance documents are not yet official, CDF is performing inspections out to 100 feet from homes. Until such time that these regulations become effective, staff has been advised to use common sense and professional judgment when advising homeowners on whether they are in compliance with the 100 foot clearance requirement.
- CDF recognizes that for some homeowners, coming into compliance out to 100 feet can be difficult, may require hard work, and in some cases can be a financial burden. Therefore, the guidelines offer alternatives to achieve defensible space and reduce wildfire intensity.
- If compliance is met out to 30 feet, but not 100 feet, the homeowner will receive a written notice of violation, (similar to a traffic "fix it ticket") with recommendations to reduce the fire hazard. The Board and the Department wish to emphasize an educational and cooperative approach with the public to reduce fire hazards.